



***Public Trust:  
Customer Service and Public Engagement***

**Fifth Round of Countywide Community Forums**

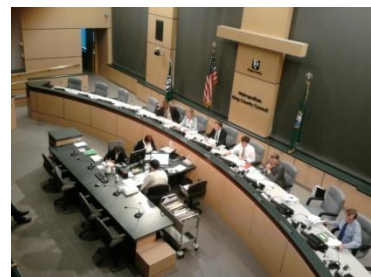
**May 1 – June 13, 2010**

**Final Report**

*By*

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*A King County public engagement program in the Auditor's Office*





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*Through objective and independent audits and services, we promote and improve performance, accountability, and transparency in King County government.*

### ***Auditor's Office Vision***

*Our work is of the highest quality and integrity resulting in significant improvements in accountability, performance, and efficiency in county government, and it promotes public trust.*



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The King County Auditor's Office provides oversight of county government

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## SUMMARY

Between May 1 and June 13, 2010, King County citizens gathered at 33 forums throughout the region to watch a videotaped panel discussion about customer service and public engagement featuring King County Executive Dow Constantine, King County Council Chair Bob Ferguson and PRR, Inc. CEO Rita Brogan, discuss the topic and fill out a 89-question survey using a rating scale. An additional 112 responses were collected online. Of those who responded online, 88% also watched the topic video. The resulting 306 Opinionnaire<sup>®</sup> responses are compiled for this report and provide a nuanced overview of respondents reactions to the county's customer service and public engagement efforts.

Forty-seven percent<sup>1</sup> of the participants were from Seattle, 11% from the unincorporated areas and the remaining 42% from suburban cities (vs. actual King County distribution of 31%/18%/51%). Respondents are mostly long time county residents with 75% living in King County more than 10 years. Each round of forums has brought more ethnic/racial diversity among respondents and the fifth round successfully including almost 35% minority representation, slightly higher than that of King County. Sixty-six percent of respondents have at least a four-year college degree. Forty-four percent attended at least one previous round of forums.

While 36% were neutral, 41% were satisfied to extremely satisfied about King County institutions as a whole. Respondents are only moderately informed about King County institutions. They are better informed about how to obtain information from King County (49% informed/very informed) than how to contribute meaningful information (42%) or obtain services (38%) and they understand better the role of elected officials (47% informed/very informed) than that of King County as a regional provider of service (42%) or local government (40%). In fact, the highest rate of uninformed/very uninformed respondents (31%) was about King County's role as a local government, a probable reflection of the high rate of responses from urban incorporated areas.

Respondents value all suggested customer service characteristics highly, with knowledge being considered the most important (90% as important/very important), but closely followed by timeliness (89%), fairness (86%), courtesy (85%), ease of access (84%), and being result oriented (81%). Among other additional characteristics written in by respondents, transparency was mentioned most often, followed by honesty/integrity.

Sixty-five percent of respondents used county services within the last year but, based on the number of people who abstained from responding to questions related to specific types of experiences, probably made higher use of website services (28% abstention) than self help/resource kiosk (65% abstention). The abstention rate was about 38% for in person experience, and 45% for telephone experience. Overall, a majority (52%) agreed that both their recent King County experience was satisfactory/very satisfactory and that they were able to accomplish their goals/objectives in a reasonable amount of time. Fifty-five percent agreed/strongly agreed that they had been treated with respect throughout their experience.

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<sup>1</sup> All percentages are based on the number of respondents who provided a response. Blank, "abstain", and "object" responses were not included in the total.

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– May/June 2010*

When asked about public engagement, a plurality of respondents most agreed that they have opportunities to participate in county government decision-making (43% agree/strongly agree), that King County supports and encourages participation (40%), and that King County promotes a culture of participation (34%). More disagreed than agreed that King County ensures that public engagement serves the needs of the participants (26% agreed vs. 32% disagreed) and that King County is willing to listen and be influenced when residents participate (35% vs. 38%).

When asked what strategy the government could use among existing or possible processes to engage the public, respondents strongly favored hearings, meetings and workshops in their community (67%) and the Countywide Community Forums (66%). They most disliked telephone meetings and webinars. Respondents chose similar strategies for local and regional issues. They agreed that meetings in the community and in-person town hall meetings were particularly effective for local issues. Countywide Community Forums were seen as effective for both local and regional issues.

Sixty-six percent would be likely to review publicly reported performance measures. When asked where the responsibility for a healthy civic infrastructure lies, most (45%) said with both governments and citizens, but with 34% leaning toward government and 20% toward citizens. When asked whether public engagement should happen face-to-face or online, most (44%) said both, but with 33% leaning toward face-to-face and 21% toward online.

Finally, in a series of questions about the forum process, the video was deemed at least somewhat fair and even-handed to three-quarters of the respondents, while 79% thought the same of the Opinionnaire®. Thirty-one percent thought the video was too long, while 45 % thought the Opinionnaire® was too long.

For half, participating in the forum positively/very positively changed their perception that King County listens (for 11% it negatively changed their perception). For 44%, it led to better information about the topic (24% said it lead to worse information).

Three-quarters of the respondents thought that, overall, the Countywide Community Forums program was on the right track.